

# DIGITAL SAFETY

The priests of St. Mary's introductory guide to the moral use of technology, including an overview of the most prevalent media and internet dangers, particularly for young people, as well as practical suggestions and resources for responsible cell phone use.



## ***General Observations***

Although we are created by God in His own image, our wounded nature makes us prone to make mistakes, a tendency only enhanced by advances in technology. Most of us now routinely use devices that are capable of instantly putting before our eyes anything and everything—information, music, pictures, and videos.

### ***Primary Reasons to Beware of the Internet:***

- It is a resource, easily accessible anywhere on a smartphone, designed and controlled by people who want to make money and who are very good at captivating our attention.
- It is the provider of social media platforms: Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, TikTok, Facebook, WhatsApp, Pinterest, etc., widely considered to be quick and easy means for friends to stay in touch. Most platforms provide open access to anyone, however, and have frequently been used maliciously to promote pornography and subject users to extreme social pressure.
- It is the predominant source of pornography, which comprises one-third of the of the billions of gigabyte data freely available worldwide. Pornography is not only morally reprehensible but also neurologically dangerous, eliciting responses in the brain that resemble the addictive reaction to hard drug use. Addiction to pornography has nothing to do with a person's moral character or upbringing—it can happen to anyone.

### ***General Rules for Parents:***

- Recognize that no one is immune to the challenges imposed by the ascendancy of technology. Guard against naivete on the one hand and overreaction to problems on the other.
- Using smartphones, laptops, or any computer with access to

**unprotected** internet is an irresponsible use of technology, not unlike leaving loaded guns on the table in a household of curious children.

- It is **immoral** to allow children to use the internet unsupervised.

### **General Guidance:**

- Lead by example: start by examining and restricting your own internet use.
- Open and maintain lines of communication with your children. Conversations about sensitive topics are difficult but necessary. Initiate discussions with them about the internet and social media. Focus on positive education rather than mere, unexplained prohibition. The goal is responsible use of technology in the context of building virtue.
- Having explained the challenges of using technology, establish clear limits, rules, and accountability for screen time that apply to all internet users in the household. For example, no use behind closed doors, or in the bedrooms, or during family gatherings, meals, or outings.
- Encourage transparency. Reassure your children that they can and should come to you for advice about anything. If they are ever troubled by something they see or experience online, they should stop what they are doing and tell you right away.
- Learn about resources for parents, such as filtering apps and secure Wi-Fi routers, to protect everyone in the home from the dangers of the internet.
- Provide for and encourage healthy screen-free recreation and activities such as sports and hobbies.
- Spend quality screen-free time with each child often and avoid using technology as a babysitter—the youngest are most susceptible to becoming captivated and addicted to the screen.

- Postpone providing personal smartphones for older children until the final year of high school or later.

## RESOURCES

**ProtectYoungEyes.com (PYE).** PYE is currently one of the best resources available. Dedicated to raising awareness of digital safety threats and to providing practical instructions for device protection from inappropriate internet material and social media abuse, they offer:

- a free website and weekly email that include thorough up-to-date information regarding the latest apps and games that parents should be concerned about.
- an app with easy-to-follow instructions and information for digital protection.

The SSPX does not have any official affiliation with PYE, and we might not agree with everything that they present regarding parenting, in general. Nevertheless, PYE is a very valuable resource for internet safeguards.

### **FightTheNewDrug.org; TruthAboutPorn.org**

**Books.** *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport is an excellent book about healthy tech use. A more complete list of reading resources will be published soon.

**Safe routers.** Phone and home internet protection begins with a safe router that filters the internet at the source (Wi-Fi), therefore protecting all devices with access to home Wi-Fi. Recommendations:

- **OpenDNS,**
- **CleanBrowsing.org**
- **Gryphon**

### **Layered Protection**

- Provide multiple layers of protection with accountability apps, which are the best for developing good habits of

responsible phone use and for preventing overuse, escapism, and occasions of sin. A good combination would include:

- **Covenant Eyes** a safe internet source (VPN) and a monitor of everything on the screen, making “loopholes” impossible, and provides an accountability partner.
- **Bark** which monitors social media and texting at a parent-set level, including everything that is sent in communications as well as apps downloaded.

**THE BEST PLAN** for developing good phone habits and avoiding occasions of sin or threats to privacy is to use cell **phones without internet capacity**. Here are our recommended devices in order of preference:

1. **Wisephone**
  - a. It looks like a smart phone but has no internet or social media capability.
  - b. It has a basic maps/navigation app.
  - c. It can be used with your family network provider.
  - d. It has a **family portal for accountability**.
  - e. Techless.com
2. **Lightphone**
  - a. It is extremely simple, with no internet or social media capability.
  - b. It has a basic maps/navigation app.
  - c. It can be used with your family network provider.
  - d. Thelightphone.com
3. **Gabb**
  - a. It looks like a smart phone but has no internet or social media capability.
  - b. **It has no maps/navigation.**
  - c. **It has no parental control.**
  - d. **It needs its own network provider.**
  - e. It is a less expensive option than others listed.
  - f. Gabbwireless.com
4. **Pinwheel**
  - a. It looks like a smart phone but has no internet or social media capability.
  - b. **It has no maps/navigation.**

- c. **It has a very thorough parental control system—so thorough that this is not really recommended for adults.**
- d. It can be used with your family network provider.
- e. It is a less expensive option than others listed.
- f. Pinwheel.com

Setting up a safe internet connection can be confusing and time consuming but considering the risks of real inevitable threats to our souls and to those entrusted to us, establishing preventative measures is well worth the effort.

*Let us support each other in the quest for digital safety for the sake of souls. Please talk about it and share information.*